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## **CGA Environment Committee**

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### **Comments on:**

**SB-226: AAC SINGLE-USE CARRYOUT BAGS**

**Submitted by Carolyn Bayne, Natural Resources Director, LWVCT**

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**The League of Women Voters of Connecticut is a non-partisan statewide organization comprised of 1600 members in 27 local chapters who are committed to effective public policy and the active participation of citizens in their government.**

The League supports policies that reduce the generation of solid waste, including those that promote reuse and recycling. Toward that end, we support efforts to reduce the staggering number of single-use carryout bags that enter Connecticut's waste stream.

Disposable plastic bags are a major source of litter and pollution in our environment. Estimates vary on the percentage of bags recycled, though it is very low despite the fact that most grocers and large retailers accept plastic bags for recycling and generally provide a bin for them near the front of the store. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states that "plastics" are recycled at almost fourteen percent, but in addition to bags, that estimate also includes "sacks and wraps" ([http://www3.epa.gov/epawaste/wastes\\_archive/plastics.htm](http://www3.epa.gov/epawaste/wastes_archive/plastics.htm)). A much-quoted statistic from the Wall Street Journal puts the estimate closer to five percent. The majority of some 100 billion bags distributed in the United States annually end up in landfills, incinerators, oceans, waterways, and throughout the land. It is important to note that plastic bags do not biodegrade; they photo-degrade into increasingly smaller bits that contaminate both soil and waterways, harming fish and other wildlife. Incineration is not a desirable option, as it releases toxins that are harmful to human health.

Single-use paper bags are also problematic for several reasons: they must be made from virgin pulp to be suitably durable for market use, both their manufacture and distribution are resource-intensive, and they are difficult to reuse because they tear easily.

Because a reduction in both types of bags is consistent with our goal of reducing solid waste, the League supports the requirement in SB-226 that requires the Commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to work with the grocery and retail industries to achieve a fifty per cent reduction in the distribution of paper bags and plastic single-use carryout bags by 2021.

However, the other requirements in SB-226 concerning the content and recyclability of single-use carryout bags seem less likely to achieve the objective that consumers reuse bags multiple times before recycling them. As long as plastic bags are provided to consumers at no cost, there is no incentive for their reuse. Given the historically low rates at which plastic bags are recycled, these bags would most likely either end up in the garbage or creating litter, just as they do now.

Rather than focus on the content of single-use bags, effort might better be spent creating incentives to reuse the bags as intended or transitioning consumers into fully reusable bags.

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut appreciates the opportunity to offer our comments.